The Village

www.villageonline.co.uk

Issue #243 April 2024

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

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TheVillage Issue 243 April 2024

inside

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Front cover: Bluebells in Will's Wood, Rowney Green, taken by Michael Corfield.

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'8 Hills' park closer to fruition

THE AMBITIOUS project to create a regional park in the landscape and villages between Bromsgrove and the Birmingham conurbation has moved a step closer towards becoming a reality.

Commissioned by the National Trust, a "spatial framework" for the 8 Hills Regional Park has now been published.

This is described as "the starting point for the exploration of opportunities with stakeholders and local communities to contribute to the delivery of the regional park".

Within its 116 pages, the authors have taken on suggestions from the public and local organisations for the park, including amending the boundary.

For example, it has been expanded in the north to include Cofton Park and in the south to take in all of Rowney Green as these are seen as being able to contribute to the "vision" for the park, covering around 47 square miles.

This vision has been revised to say: "8 Hills Regional Park will recognise and support the health and wellbeing needs of a growing population by providing improved access to the area and around the area, including through an expanded public access network and entry points, wildlife habitats and recreational and tourism opportunities."

The next steps villagers might see are various pilot projects across the area over the next two years.

Calagate stalemate

THE PLANNING officer overseeing efforts to ensure access to public open space on a village housing estate has now confirmed that a new gate is indeed locked to all of those without the code. In an update to Barnt Green Parish Council, district councillor Charlie Hotham said he had received a message from her to say she was still chasing the problem on the CALA Foxhills estate in the village and had been out to check the gate for herself.

He added: "There is an understanding that they will eventually have to open both gates, but they are for some reason digging their heels in."

Old tukkers: Malcolm Douglas and Trevor Woolley (holding the maps).

2,500 miles on Indian 'mower'

TWO VILLAGERS with a combined age of 133 years are about to embark on what could be a very uncomfortable adventure to raise money for good causes.

Trevor Woolley, of Rowney Green, and Malcolm Douglas, of Alvechurch, are going to drive a three-wheeled motor rickshaw – often called a tuk-tuk – through India, from Shillong in the north east to Kochi in the south west.

It's around 2,500 miles, depending on the route they follow, and they have 15 days to complete the journey in what has been described as a glorified lawnmower, starting on April 5.

Meanwhile, as the "Rickshaw Run" organisers point out: "There's no set route, no back-up and no way of knowing if you're going to make it. The only certainty is that you will get lost, you will get stuck and you will break down."

The pair are raising money for the Cool Earth charity, which helps indigenous villages fight deforestation. Once he hits his £500 target, Trevor will then donate further money raised to The Smile Train, which helps children with cleft lips and palates.

■ See *Two Old Tukkers* on Facebook or search for *Trevor Woolley* on Justgiving.com

Police stall in 20mph muddle

VILLAGERS gathered to hear West Mercia police commissioner John Campion say he was in favour of police enforcing 20mph speed limits through villages.

But Insp Richard Field, of the Road Safety Team, told the meeting at Alvechurch Parish Council that officers followed Department of Transport guidance that enforcement was a "last resort".

He added: "In Worcestershire we have a decision not to enforce 20mph."

This apparent contradiction was taken further by Mr Campion, the elected commissioner who oversees policing policy for the force, when he said: "I am aware of 20mph being enforced elsewhere in the county."

His "expectation" was that where a 20mph zone was enforceable, then it should be.

He added: "There is a Worcestershire problem with 20mph zones that are advisory in the eyes of the law rather than enforceable."

Parish chairman Marc Worrall assured him that the traffic regulation orders, which make a speed limit enforceable, were in place for the 20mph zone in the centre of Alvechurch.

Bringing the session with Mr Campion to a close, Coun Worrall said: "I would like you to take away from tonight that this community would like to see the 20mph limit enforced in our village."

Mr Campion is standing for re-election as commissioner in May.

Golf homes plan scratched

BORDESLEY AND BEOLEY villagers are celebrating a decision to throw out plans for 214 homes on land adjoining and on part of The Abbey golf course.

There was standing room only as villagers packed Redditch Borough Council's chamber to see the planning committee reject unanimously the plans by David Wilson homes for the site to the west of Hither Green Lane.

The proposals had been recommended for approval by the planning officer, who presented a lengthy report detailing the controversial proposals.

While accepting that the council currently has around twice the housing land supply required, the officer said agreeing to 214 more homes – 60 of which would be "affordable" – should be seen as "supporting the Government's stated objective of significantly boosting the supply of housing".

After hearing from a string of opponents, with residents represented by North Redditch Communities Alliance, members of the planning committee in turn raised a wide number of reasons why the scheme was unacceptable to them.

They then swung behind a motion proposed by Coun Bill Hartnett recommending refusal on the grounds that Redditch's housing land supply was already in surplus, that the character and density of the development was out of keeping with the current homes on Hither Green Lane and that the land is open space and not designated for housing.

Have a say on station lifts

VILLAGERS concerned over the long wait for passenger lifts at Barnt Green railway station are being urged to attend a meeting to which Network Rail representatives have been invited.

The Barnt Green Annual Parish Meeting starts at 7pm on April 22 at the Friends Meeting House on Sandhills Road, with the station lifts among the topics to be discussed.

Parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley urged villagers to attend after hearing at the March parish council meeting that there had been no updates from Network Rail for more than three months on when work on the lifts would begin.

Meanwhile, in Alvechurch, where the station has lifts, but no one can be sure if they are working, district councillor Alan Bailes met Network Rail staff who agreed to find a better way to communicate with residents when the lifts are out of action.

They also agreed to fill potholes in the station car park and raise the level where it floods to help drainage. West Midland Trains, meanwhile, would continue to pump the water from the car park.

Chris Lamb (above) celebrates as The Weighbridge Inn, Alvechurch, is again named Pub of the Year by the Redditch & Bromsgrove branch of the Campaign for Real Ale.

Chris, who took over as landlord three years ago, is quickly building a wall of certificates at the pub to match those of the previous licensees John and Jayne.

He is now hoping for success in the West Midlands regional awards.

TOYS, PLEASE!

ACORNS CHILDREN'S HOSPICE shop in Barnt Green has made a plea to villagers for toy donations. Families who have any old or "pre-loved" toys or puzzles for all ages (although they kindly ask please no boxed toys) are welcome to take them to the shop to donate, so they can be loved by a new child.

ALVECHURCH MORRIS Men paid visits to the team at Alvechurch Larder (pictured above) and Acorns Children's Hospice (pictured below) to present them with cheques for £265 each.

The money was raised through donations made by the audience at the group's New Year's Day Mummers Play, both on the day and through their JustGiving page afterwards.

The Morris Men said: "Our thanks to everyone who donated, and we hope that you enjoyed the play!"

For anyone who missed it, it's available to watch on YouTube (search "Alvechurch Mummers 2024").

CURTAINS rise (left) for Alvechurch Amateur Dramatic Society's upcoming production **Murder on the Nile** *in April (running 25-27).*

The play, which is adapted from the Agatha Christie novel, begins as the cast embark on the Nile steamer **Lotus**. *The thriller is set to have the audience guessing at every twist and turn, and entertained until the end.*

Held in Alvechurch Village Hall, Tickets are £9, with £8 concessions. Tickets are available from The Lounge, Alvechurch or phoning/ texting 07977 140088. You can also email ads.alvechurch@gmail.com

The best place to call home

As it marks its first anniversary, Cofton Park Manor is now celebrating its recent ranking among the Top 20 care homes in the West Midlands, in the Care Home Awards 2024.

A DEDICATED team at a Cofton Hackett care home are celebrating after being given a top ranking in a prestigious award.

The team at Cofton Park Manor Care Home on Lickey Road have received the ranking in the Care Home Awards 2024.

The home is one of the top 20 rated care homes in the West Midlands – all based on independent reviews published on carehome.co.uk by residents, family and friends.

Regional Community Relations Lead Wendy Sibley said the team were hugely proud to have been ranked so high. She said: "We are not entirely surprised as we have a fantastic team here at Cofton Park Manor and everyone is dedicated to providing the very best service. It is lovely to be recognised for the work that we do, we enjoy working with our wonderful residents and it is so nice to be highlighted like this. Thank you to everyone who wrote a review!"

Cofton Park Manor recently celebrated its first anniversary, and has already established strong roots in the community supporting several local charities including Acorns Children's Hospice Birmingham.

The home is built on the former Clarks Motors site and also has strong connections with the local Pride of Longbridge group, with members bringing along some fantastic classic cars from time to time.

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DOES NOBODY THINK?

Dear Editor – I have been watching road workers from my window on Ten Ashes Lane, Cofton Hackett, removing large sections of the road, and closing it for two days, but in a well-oiled and systemic fashion.

I wonder about the waste of council tax payers' money when councils are going bankrupt.

Three months ago, gas contractors closed the lane due to corrosion of the gas main and started to dig up sections of the pavement and small sections of the road.

After several days it was evident that the work was required but not practical in the way it had been planned, and a lot more planning was required – which involved digging up the whole road again in the near future.

The work that they had done thus far was reinstated to a good standard (as vehicles were able to cut through at high speed). The cost of the work being carried out now in my opinion will have been wasted as the lane will be dug up again.

Is this a case of council officers not researching and looking at future projects?

Graham Moseley
Cofton Hackett

Parking payment problems

Dear Editor – We recently received penalty notices demanding £100 fines on two consecutive days in January stating that we had committed an offence as we had not paid for parking on the station car park in Barnt Green.

We had, in fact, not parked on the car park on either date but drove in on both days to turn around.

The demand for these payments was accompanied by a single set of photos showing our car entering the car park on day one and leaving on day two.

The payments operating company alleged we had stayed in the car park overnight. We appealed and won our case. They stated in their response that the camera may have missed an entry/exit and automatically charged.

We write to alert other drivers of the potential for error of these ANPR systems and express our concern that they are generating erroneous demands for payments which, if not successfully appealed, cause further demands for payment and debt collection.

Concerned resident
Barnt Green

Time to read up on this great facility

Dear Editor – I have recently attempted to catch up with that English Lit. that I should have read a long time ago.

I have been greatly assisted in this by the excellent librarians in Alvechurch, and so far have managed to read some George Eliot, and G.K. Chesterton (not easy) and I shall soon be enlisting their help on Shaw, Trollope and Thackeray.

Cuts are being made by all local authorities, and we don't want to lose this service, so to villagers I say, please do make use of the facility whenever possible.

Peter McHugh , Alvechurch

Have your say . . . about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication.
We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is April 10th 2024.

WHERE'S VINNY?

ISAAC Bridge, aged eight, from Blackwell and a pupil at Blackwell First School, shows off the Mini Vinny he won for finding the little creature in March's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village* magazine.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email – see details on the bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on April 7 2024. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

Vital village infrastructure

Dear Editor – I, like many others I'm sure, have seen the fields opposite Alvechurch Football Club have been put up for sale.

My concern is that should this land be bought by a developer, which is likely considering the size and scale of the land, this could result in hundreds of new houses being built on the outskirts of the village, which is already buckling under the pressure of the extreme lack of infrastructure.

For more than 10,000 people, the villagers of Alvechurch currently have one over-subscribed school, one shop, one chemist, one doctors surgery, one dentist, no post office (though we do now have quite a few cafes!).

I assume (possible naively), that should the land be bought by a developer, that considerations for the village's infrastructure will have to be taken by Bromsgrove District Council?

Considering that proposals for developments in Hopwood were recently rejected, will planning permission now be requested here?

Worried, Alvechurch

Editor's note: *A large housing developer already holds the option to buy the land in question and has the right to extend that option with any new owner, so the current sale will make little difference to its status.*

In fact, large developers hold options on all of the land surrounding Alvechurch, in the hope that Green Belt and other planning policies may one day be changed to make them avaialbe to their bulldozers.

This magazine has been campaigning for more than 25 years against such large-scale development, which would suburbanise Alvechurch and other villages, while recognising that smaller and in-fill development to create homes for local people is desirable. We fear "crunch time" may not be far away.

Missing the bus

Dear Editor – Bring back the 146 bus service in Alvechurch. I miss it very much, and others miss it too.

Mark Williams, Alvechurch

Editor's note: *If you would like to have your say on bus services in Alvechurch, District Councillors invite you to complete a survey online use the QR code below or follow the link at: www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/AlvechurchTransportSurveySpring2024/*

The survey can also be completed via paper copies which will be available at Alvechurch Library, The Lounge, Alvechurch Parish Council offices, Alvechurch Dental practice and the Community Larder.

The survey should take no more than a few minutes to complete and will close on Monday April 15 2024.

Words & pictures by Keith Woolford

Sinfonia spring season

THE Midland Sinfonia has had busy spring, with a number of concerts and outreach projects.

Burcot Grange and Lodge invited the musicians to play for their residents, and welcomed them with a fully-packed lounge.

Shulah Oliver-Smith, TMS Artistic Director, on the violin was accompanied by cellist Anna Joubert, and together they stirred memories of times passed, which encouraged sing-a-longs and there was even some dancing! The Grange and Lodge had an afternoon of such merriment that residents have already been requesting pieces for TMS's return visit.

Continuing their outreach programme, TMS also visited Bromsgrove Dementia Cafe at their new venue, Bromsgrove Rugby Club for their March meeting.

The organiser, Vicky Tramontana, on behalf of AgeUK, was delighted with the largest attendance since the group started in April 2022. Almost 40 people including carers enjoyed a morning of familiar music.

The young performers with their instruments of choice.

Fun was had by all at Burcot Grange and Lodge.

With a programme of classical and popular tunes, there were many smiling faces!

The meetings are free to attend and they will be welcoming the Nancy Butterfly Dancers at their Wednesday 10 April get together.

TMS celebrated their young musicians at the annual Young Musicians' Showcase, which encourages schoolchildren of all abilities to perform for an appreciative audience.

The event was held at St Laurence Church, Alvechurch, where nine children played a mixture of classical pieces and modern work.

The piano dominated this year with the violin, voice and saxophone adding variety.

Shulah held a workshop offering experienced advice and support before they took the stage.

Certificates of participation were presented by Rev Martin Allen, from the church, who were part sponsors of the initiative.

A group effort

AN overcast morning greeted volunteers who gathered at the Holy Trinty church cemetery extension in Lickey, to take part in clearence work .

The clearance was undertaken in preparation for the anticipated official"'closing" of the cemetery and handing the maintenance duties over to Bromsgrove District Council.

A programme of wildflower seeding has seen the area grow a little wild following the local parish council's input. Where there are unsteady head stones, these will be laid flat to ensure the safety of visitors to the cemetery.

20 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

Our April 2004 cover showed cowslips captured by Lickey photographer Jo Cound, who was a regular contributor. The What's On section (just one page in those days!) promoted Jo's photography workshops.

IN THE NEWS: There was much discontent in Alvechurch due to two high-profile building projects: the new schools site on Birmingham Road, chosen without the promised public consultation, and The Ark at St Laurence Church. In a parish poll, villagers voted 4-1 against the controversial land sale which was paying for the modern extension to the church.

ALVECHURCH LIONS Football Club was celebrating its first anniversary with a successful league campaign. The team had grown from just six boys training at the Meadows to 12 members playing in the Central Warwickshire Youth Football League Division E, and hoped to secure promotion in the next few weeks.

CHILD ACTING star Jack Montgomery and his sister Elizabeth pose with Gary Wilmot in London's West End. Jack, of Alvechurch, was playing Jeremy in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* at the London Palladium and Gary was playing his father.

10 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

OUR APRIL 2014 cover is probably the only one in 25 years to feature a sheep and lamb, although we'd like to do it again some time if we can ever capture a decent shot. From memory, it took Dennis Brown quite some time to find suitable subjects willing to hold a pose long enough to take this picture!

THE WINNER of the Picnic in the Park logo competition, Hannah Dale (centre), along with runners-up Emma Cross and Lottie Reeves, are presented with their awards by organising committee member Louise Mardling.

ROGER HOLLINGWORTH (ABOVE) stood down after nine years as leader of Bromsgrove District Council. Roger, who had also been chairman of Alvechurch Parish Council, was instrumental in many village projects, including the early days of The Lounge.

A NEW BELL (above) was made for St Michael's Church, Cofton Hackett, after the original fell victim to thieves. Created by the John Taylor & Co foundry in Loughborough at a cost of around £9,000, it bears the inscription: "Cast October 2013 to replace the 1852 William Blews bell stolen in October 2012."

Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council News

Annual Report 2024

Message from the Chairman

Greetings to all of our residents.

The Parish Council has kept the residents informed by publishing information on social media, our website and noticeboards on a regular basis; but this annual report will summarise what the Parish Council and community groups have been up to throughout 2023-2024.

It is a pleasure to continue to work for our local community, and our work could not be done without our Councillors, volunteers, contractors and all of those who have contacted the Parish Council in the last year. If you have any feedback for the Council on how to enhance the quality of the service we provide, please get in touch.

Cllr Bakul Kumar

Planning Committee report

It has been a busy period for the Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council Planning Committee, which processed 53 applications. The members were diligent in using the National Planning Policy Framework, Bromsgrove District Plan, and the Neighbourhood Development Plan of the Parish Council.

The breakdown of applications and their outcomes is:

New dwellings and amendments	13
Extensions	26
Garages	9
Other	5

Residents join in with the annual litter pick in Blackwell.

The Planning Committee objected to 18 of these applications.

At the time of writing, the District Council has refused five of these applications in total. The decisions on ten of the above applications have not yet been made.

Meetings of the Parish Council Planning Committee take place on alternate Tuesdays at the Trinity Centre office. Residents are welcome to attend. Agendas are published on our website the week before.

Environmental Group Report

The Councillors worked with residents, volunteers and contractors in planting daffodils and snowdrops in the Parish.

Residents planting Daffodil bulbs.

As a part of action on climate change, the Parish Council has adopted the Biodiversity Action Plan, Tackling Climate Change Policy, Wildflower Policy and updated the Environment Policy.

In March, many residents joined us for the annual litter pick in Blackwell and supported the Lickey Country Park volunteers at their litter pick.

We bade farewell to Allan Postgate, who had worked hard as a Footpath warden for several years. Paul Hart has replaced him. Paul has already cleared Rainbow Way, which runs from Spirehouse Lane to Greenhill.

Allan Postgate removing a fallen branch.

The Play Area on St Catherine's Road now has a new fence and gate, which the Parish Council had installed.

Our Executive Officer has applied for funding to upgrade this area.

Cllr Bakul Kumar

All photographs on this page were taken by Cllr Bakul Kumar

Highways Report

There have been several road closures to allow repairs and installation by the utility services. The new vehicle-activated sign is working well on the Old Birmingham Road. Speeding continues to be a problem on Twatling Road, and measures are being taken.

Poor parking in front of the school on Old Birmingham Road seems to be an ongoing problem. The Parish Council is working with the Headteacher and District and County councillors to ease this problem.

Parking on Monument Lane during New Year celebrations caused problems for the residents. The Parish Council will work with the District Council to overcome this issue. New Year's Eve also saw a road accident on the corner of Monument Lane and Old Birmingham Road, leading to damage to a lamp post, verge, fencing and Christmas lights. Repairs have taken place.

Cllr N Forknell and Cllr B Kumar

Finance Report

The audited summary of receipts and payments for the year ending 31st March 2023 is shown here (right), with the 2021/22 figures for comparison.

Income

Receipts were £3,312 lower than in 2021/22, although most of this reduction was explained by lower refunds for Value Added Tax (the figure for 2021/22 was unusually high because it included a late refund related to 2020/21).

We received a total of £748 in grants from Worcestershire County Council.

Expenditure

We spent £4,836 more than in 2021/22, with increased spend on our community events. (These include the Christmas lighting events, Best Front Garden competition and afternoon tea for older residents, plus support for the Blackwell festival.)

As usual our biggest area of activity in terms of spending is the maintenance of open spaces in the parish, including maintenance of the play area in Blackwell, mowing and planting.

We spent less on grants to community organisations than in 2021/22, but we are always open to applications for financial support from local community groups and organisations, so please do spread the word.

The net position for the year was a small deficit of £9, which was funded from the Council's unallocated reserves. The above statements represent fairly the financial position of the Council for the year ended 31st March 2023.

The precept, which has remained unchanged at £50,000 for a number of years, will be increased to £55,000 for 2024/25. This will help to fund some significant improvements to the play area.

We will be seeking the views of local children on our plans over the coming months, so watch this space!

Last year the Parish Council awarded £1,500 in grants to community groups. Please get in touch if your group would like to apply for funding.

Cllr Anna Boehm

2021/22 (£)	RECEIPTS	2022/23 (£)
50,000	Precept	50,000
1,500	Grants	748
50	Interest received	922
5,071	VAT refunds	1,661
2,613	Lengthsman	2,504
0	Other income	87
59,234	**TOTAL**	**55,922**
	PAYMENTS	
7,211	General administration	9,310
12,753	Salaries & staff expenses	13,534
10,890	Play areas & open spaces	9,489
2,952	Community events	4,801
2,000	Donations & grants	1,000
6,690	Highways & litter picking	7,300
2,877	Cemetery maintenance	2,573
879	Health, wellbeing & safety	816
2,119	Newsletter	3,351
2,724	VAT paid	3,757
51,095	**TOTAL**	**55,931**
8,139	**Surplus/(deficit)**	**(9)**

An audited summary of receipts and payments for the years 2021/22 and 2022/23 to March 31.

Communications Group Report

Lickey Christmas celebrations.

Our annual events have gone well this year – thanks to all who attended and contributed to making them a huge success.

This year we collaborated for the first time with Blackwell Community Hall for our Blackwell Christmas celebration, with mince pies, mulled wine and a visit from Santa.

In Lickey, we had songs from the Lickey School choir and music from the Blackwell Concert Band.

Emily was our overall Christmas Card Competition winner with a brilliant design. All the children who entered enjoyed a small prize.

Our Parish Best Front Garden competition produced some fantastic winners.

The first-place large garden owner, Lesley Edwards, spoke passionately about her love of gardening and par-

The winning garden.

ticularly about choosing plants and flowers that support local wildlife.

This year's competition is due to be judged in June – the judges look for colour, plant variety, design and eco-friendliness.

The Residents' Afternoon Tea was well attended at the Old Rose & Crown in July. We had an enjoyable few hours with great food, interesting talks and some singing too. The date of this year's event is to be confirmed — watch this space! Complimentary tickets will be available via our Executive Officer.

Our biggest change this year has been incorporating our news items into *The Village* magazine. Our aim is to ensure we reach as many residents as possible whilst also saving paper and, in a small way, helping the environment.

All event information can be found on our website and Facebook page. Let us know your views!

Cllr Bernice Jones

All photographs in this section are courtesy of Cllr Bakul Kumar

Lickey WI

We are a friendly group based in Lickey who would give a warm welcome to any new members.

Last year we had informative talks on The Titanic, Shakespeare's Women and — ahead of the 60th anniversary of his assassination — John F. Kennedy. We also had an entertaining talk by a Worcestershire thriller writer, whose books the Lickey WI book group have enjoyed reading.

We enjoy dining out, including a New Year Lunch Meeting in January, Afternoon Tea in a member's garden during the summer and a monthly dining club.

We also take part in the County WI skittles tournament and attend events

The ladies of Lickey WI enjoy their annual afternoon tea in the garden.

at other WIs within our Group. We look forward to another successful year as this is our 60th anniversary.

For more information, ring Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, email lickeywi@gmail.com, or visit our website www.lickeywi.wordpress.com/ or Facebook page www.facebook.com

Blackwell First School

What a busy year it has been at Blackwell First School! As the school year ended with Sports Day, maypole celebrations, a summer fair and a coronation extravaganza, the children were ready for their summer break.

We welcomed new children and families during the autumn and, after an exciting few weeks leading up to Christmas, the older children performed *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* after visiting Birmingham Rep to see a production for themselves and the younger children performed *The Nativity* — and the hankies were at the ready from proud families watching on.

This spring term saw the children produce their own films as part of "Blackwell Film Festival" and also create board games based on their historical knowledge of famous pirates.

In a world filled with challenges and disharmony, we help to develop the children's awareness of similarities and differences in our world, in order that they become respectful global citizens. This term, many classes visited places of worship, including Birmingham Grand Central Mosque, The Hindu Temple in Oldbury, Singer's Hill Synagogue and St Catherine's church. During their time with us at BFS, the children will develop a greater understanding of world religions and an appreciation of people who may live differently from themselves.

As we move into the summer term and hope for some better weather, we look forward to educational visits to Blists Hill Open Air Museum, our residential trip to Malvern, and bell boating on the canals for our Year 4s. There's a lot to look forward to.

Everyone at BFS thanks the community for their support and looks forward to another successful and happy year at school.

Anna Moss,
Headteacher – Blackwell First School

Blackwell Festival Charity Annual Report

Blackwell Festival Charity has celebrated arguably its best-ever events in 2023.

The free festival on the school field in June embraced a "Village Fayre" theme in response to feedback from local questionnaires. The event was well attended in blazing sunshine before the live band concluded the afternoon in heavy rain!

Blackwell Fayre fun and games.

The music festival in September was the biggest yet with seven quality combos ranging from youngsters performing their first paid-for gig to well-known headline bands. The 800 tickets sold out and the weather could hardly have been better.

The free Blackwell Village Festival will take place on Saturday, June 8th, with the Blackwell Music Festival staged on Saturday, September 7th.

The charity is grateful for the financial support of Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council.

More information about both events will be announced in the coming months.

Lickey Hills Country Park Annual Report

2023 was another busy year at the Lickey Hills Country Park with the rangers working in partnership with many volunteer groups to look after our habitats.

Tasks included heathland and woodland management, litter picks, invasive species control, installing new steps and signage, fixing fences and bridges, and clearing ditches. We also planted a new orchard by the Old Rose and Crown.

We lost several key players in 2023: our trainee via the Wildlife Trust's Natural Prospects scheme finished her one year placement, as did a student on a placement with us from Nottingham Trent University. Dave Beardsmore, one of the two rangers that cover the 524 acres of the LHCP — plus 70 other parks in the Northfield constituency of Birmingham, moved on to a new position in Shropshire, leaving one ranger and one warden for the area. All the more need for our fabulous volunteers.

Thankfully, the two Edgbaston rangers began working from the Lickey Hills Visitor Centre in November and are able to help hold the fort on occasion, along with the Ladywood & Perry Barr ranger.

Despite all this, we still managed to plant 2300 tree whips with *Birmingham Trees for Life* on the side of Beacon Hill to replace those felled due to the plant disease.

We worked with school groups; put on public activities such as the

Misty conditions on the hills for the volunteers of the Lickey Hills Big Help Out day.

Skywatch events with Birmingham Astronomical Society; we held a ranger-led New Year's Day walk; ran self-guided trails during the school holidays which drew in over 500 participants and worked with the Lickey Hills Society on the annual Wassail and Bilberry Wake events.

Lickey Hills Local History Society Annual Report

Our Heritage Weekend in September was our most ambitious. We continued our project to collect memories of the Lickeys, and ran children's activities. There were more displays than ever, on: Trams, Tea Rooms and Fairs; Elijah Walton's Watercolours; Our Roman Road; The Great Court at Lickey; The Monument and the Beacon Hill Drinking Fountains.

Warren Lane Quarry was open, where a Geo-champion and members of the WWI Project explained the site's geology and archaeology.

This year we ran four guided walks: two around the WWI and WWII sites led by Steve Hinton, the Ranger Services Manager; a geology walk by the Geo-champions; and a Lickey History walk run by our members.

Our talks in the Trinity Centre continued with: Triumph Motorcycles; Timber Framed Buildings; Christmas Songs Through the Ages (with live music); the Origins of HMP Birmingham; and King John: the Worst or Most Useful King.

On April 18th our talk will be on "Broadway, Worcestershire's Poshest Village", and on May 21st it will be on the history of Hewell Grange.

Our visit to Worcester Cathedral was much appreciated by members. Our guide was knowledgeable and gave us a fascinating insight into the building's history.

We had a stall at Cofton Manor's Open Day, and residents and visitors recorded their memories of past visits to the Hills. We hosted a Bromsgrove U3A at Lickey Church, where Sandra gave a talk on Lickey history.

Our research group is currently working on displays for this year's Heritage Weekend on 14th and 15th September at the Visitor Centre School Room in Warren Lane. This is free and open to everyone.

Contact: info@lhlhs.org.uk
Website: www.lhlhs.org.uk

Lickey Hills Society Annual Report

2024 marks the Lickey Hills Society's 40th anniversary since our formation in 1984. By coincidence, it is also the 40th anniversary of Birmingham's Park Ranger Service.

The Society and the rangers continue to work closely to benefit the Country Park. Birmingham's current financial situation means that it is a difficult time for the City's parks and open spaces. Volunteer groups such as ours are more vital than ever.

This year, the Society has created an information board for Rednal about "Trams to the Lickeys" and "Rednal Village" — which we hope to unveil this spring.

Last spring, a new orchard was planted near the Old Rose and Crown, jointly funded by Lickey Rotary Club and the Society.

This winter, more trees and soft fruit

The Lickey Hills Society arranged a Balsam bash to clear the invasive plant.
Image by Keith Woolford.

Image Keith Woolford.

Roy and Sue Hughes maintain the war graves in the cemetery.

Blackwell Community Hall.

bushes were added. Wildflower seeds were also bought for the area. Native daffodils have been provided for a bank near the Visitor Centre.

As usual, we have supported ranger events: the Bilberry Wake last July and the popular Wassail in January. The Society organised spring and autumn litter picks and five sessions to remove invasive Himalayan balsam: three sessions in the Country Park and two in Cofton Park.

Practical work continues on Rednal Hill following the fire in July 2022. Volunteer groups have worked to improve the valuable heathland, The Society has purchased tools for this work, as funds from Birmingham City Council are severely restricted.

The free Thursday guided walks in the Country Park continue. They start and finish at the Visitor Centre and last for about an hour. To take part, just turn up at 10.30am, no need to book.

Contact: info@lhs.org.uk
Website: www.lhs.org.uk

The Lickey Community Group

Now approaching our 25th anniversary since established, we remain vigilant on all matters in the area – especially Lickey and Marlbrook.

There is little to report on the Marlbrook Tip other than vehicle activity and reported postal deliveries. And, the 'reservoir' remains a small pond at best!

While inconsiderate parking around our school remains a challenge for residents, we are somewhat heartened that the new Headteacher is being proactive in addressing this and by offering contact details to report any situations going forward.

We are grateful to long-standing LCG members Roy and Sue Hughes who have spent much time in maintaining the war graves in the cemetery in association with the War Graves Commission.

Regular contact with the Parish Council, particularly during their informative monthly meetings, is most useful and we would thank the councillors for their hard work in the parish.

Our AGM is set for Wednesday 1 May at the Trinity Centre and we welcome both members and local residents who wish to know more about what's going on locally.

Keith Woolford, chair

Blackwell Community Hall

2024 is a big year for us! It started with the installation of an impressive new commercial grade kitchen at the start of January. This was funded by the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. We also received a grant from the Parish Council.

Following this we have been busy planning our next venture, and are excited to be able to announce that we have Muntjacs Café launching on 20 April in the hall! We will open on Saturdays from 10am until 2pm, serving freshly ground coffee and some amazing locally made cakes.

But we will need your help! We are a 'not for profit' organisation run by volunteers, and the BCH committee will be looking for some villagers to work alongside us once every six weeks on a rota basis. And even more importantly we'll need customers! Any profits we generate will go towards the running costs of the hall, so come along and support us.

The hall is run to benefit the residents of Blackwell and neighbouring areas, presently offering toddler groups, exercise classes, a table tennis club and a youth theatre group on a weekly basis, plus our wonderful 'Crafternoon Tea' group fortnightly. The hall is also available to be booked for parties.

Connect with us via Facebook or our website:
www.blackwellcommunityhall.co.uk
You can also email us at
BCHblackwell@gmail.com

Contact Us

Lisa Winterbourn, our Executive Officer, may be contacted on:
eo@lickeyandblackwellpc.org
or: 07930 837770. For more info visit:
www.lickeyandblackwellpc.org
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Women in the workplace

VHK WOMENS HEALTH

This month, Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs, from **VHK Women's Health Clinic**, discuss how they can help support women in the workplace with their menopausal care, offering both treatment and training to ensure equality for all.

Training and advice: Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs deliver education sessions for professionals to help support women's health.

FEBRUARY 2024 saw the publication of the Equality and Human Rights Commission Menopause in the Workplace: Guidance for Employers report.

This long-awaited guidance recognises that under the Equality Act 2010 if menopausal symptoms have a long-term and substantial impact on a woman's ability to carry out her job, this could be considered a disability and an employer will be under legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments.

Baroness Kishwer Falkner, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said: "As Britain's equality watchdog, we are concerned both by how many women report being forced out of a role due to their menopause-related symptoms and how many don't feel safe enough to request the workplace adjustments.

"We hope that this guidance helps ensure every woman going through the menopause is treated fairly and can work in a supportive and safe environment."

This is particularly important in 2024, because more women in the workplace are of menopausal age.

Research by the *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development* found that 67% of working women between the ages of 40-60 years with experience of menopausal symptoms said it had negatively impacted them at work.

This can be due to a variety of reasons, but most commonly cited was an impairment of concentration, increased levels of stress and a reduction in patience with colleagues and clients.

There are a variety of treatment options and support that can be offered to peri-menopausal and menopausal women to support them with both the physical symptoms (hot sweats and flushes to name just two) and the symptoms affecting concentration, anxiety, sleep disturbance and mood disorder of menopause – which are often the most impactful.

Women will often benefit from a detailed assessment from an experience health care professional to assess symptoms and recommend an individual treatment plan to improve symptoms.

This might incorporate both HRT and psychological intervention such as cognitive behavioural therapy, sleep support and lifestyle advice. It might also include management of heavy irregular periods that can affect women so commonly. Women, work colleagues and managers rarely talk about the impact of menopausal symptoms, what work-place adjustments may be of benefit and how to implement these.

Incorporating training and educational webinars and events within the workplace environment can be the first step to opening the conversation and actively engaging to improve the workplace support to the workforce group.

VHK Women's Health Clinic offers both treatment, and education and training, including:

- Individual medical consultations to women to support them with all aspects of women's health.
- Specific peri-menopausal and menopause consultations.
- Delivering tailored workplace education and support to employers and employees to support the delivery of workplace menopause care.

Please get in touch if you would like to start this conversation.
www.vhkwomenshealth.com
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Appointments are also available, which can be booked at www.vhkwomenshealth.com

Village Schools

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Whilst the school keeps the pupils at the heart of everything, it also does its best to support parents and carers. Wrap-around care is offered from 7.45am to 6pm for those that need it with homework and breakfast club there to help.

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A dancer's dream club

Amy Greaves, head of the **Amy Greaves School of Dance**, tells ***The Village*** more about the club's history and ethos, its exciting future including the new classes and experiences coming up for their dancers. Find out more about how you can get involved in one of the most inclusive, varied and experienced dance schools in the area.

FOR nearly two decades, the **Amy Greaves School of Dance** has been a beacon of creativity, growth, and community in the world of performing arts.

What started as a modest venture with just a handful of classes and students has blossomed into a thriving institution under the dedicated leadership of Amy Greaves herself.

Amy's journey with the school is not merely a story of growth in numbers, but one of passion, dedication, and a firm belief in the transformative power of dance. With a team of skilled teachers and over 120 students, the school has become synonymous with excellence in dance education.

Central to the ethos of the Amy Greaves School of Dance is the belief that dance should be accessible to all. Amy herself attests to the profound impact dance has had on her life, both physically and mentally. This belief fuels her commitment to providing a nurturing environment where students can not only excel in their craft but also grow in self-confidence and self-expression.

Beyond just honing dance skills, Amy emphasizes the importance of instilling lifelong skills in her students. Dance, she believes, is not just about mastering choreography but about developing resilience, discipline, and teamwork—qualities that are invaluable in any career path.

At the heart of the Amy Greaves School of Dance is a vibrant community. It's not merely a place to take classes; it's a place to forge lasting friendships, support one another, and celebrate achievements together. Students are encouraged to explore their creativity and express themselves freely, fostering an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered.

Classes in session: Students can learn a variety of different dance styles including Cheer, Ballet and Commercial.

The school offers a diverse range of events and opportunities for students to showcase their talents and broaden their horizons. From exhilarating shows to prestigious awards ceremonies, from local performances to trips to iconic venues like the Blackpool Tower, students are given a platform to shine and grow as performers.

One recent highlight for the school has been selection to perform at the CYD Super Convention in Liverpool – a testament to the calibre of talent nurtured within its walls. Such opportunities not only showcase the students' skills but also inspire them to dream big and reach for the stars.

Amy's unwavering passion for dance is infectious, driving her students to push boundaries and surpass expectations.

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Dogs, goats and comets

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

APRIL and with the Sun setting an hour later since the start of British Summer Time, we have to wait until nearly 8pm before we can begin observing.

Before the sky is properly dark, however, over in the glow of sunset, we can see the giant of our planets: Jupiter.

Unmistakable, it is still impressive and the brightest object in the night sky. Well. . . apart from the Moon which is not visible in our evening skies at the start of the month.

It will form a thin crescent close to Jupiter on the 10th and incidentally, Uranus is close by, too, although not visible to the naked eye.

As the days go by, Jupiter will get closer to the Sun and become very tricky to see by the end of the month so make the most. It will be back later in the year.

As the skies darken further, the brighter stars will appear, the first of these probably being Sirius, over in the south.

This is technically the brightest star in our night sky because it is relatively close to us and is 20 times brighter than our Sun despite being only twice the size.

Interestingly, it has a tiny companion, called Sirius B, which was discovered to be a white dwarf by the Hubble Space Telescope.

Sirius sits in the constellation of Canis Major so is known as the "Dog Star".

It is low in our skies though, so looking high overhead, up where the air is clear (altogether now), Capella will appear at about the same time.

Sitting in the constellation of Auriga, the goatherd, it gets called the "Goat Star".

As the minutes tick by, more stars begin to appear, probably the first of these will be Procyon, above Sirius. It too has a white dwarf companion and it sits in the tiniest constellation of Canis Minor, the smaller of Orion's two hunting dogs. This earns it the soubriquet of the "Little Dog Star". Is there a theme evolving here?

Slightly later, two of Orion's stars become visible.

To the right of Procyon, is that colossal star, Betelgeuse. A red supergiant, it has lived fast and will die young, probably within 10,000 years or so, ending its life in a supernova.

Below Betelgeuse is Rigel, a blue supergiant whose name roughly translates as "the left leg of the giant".

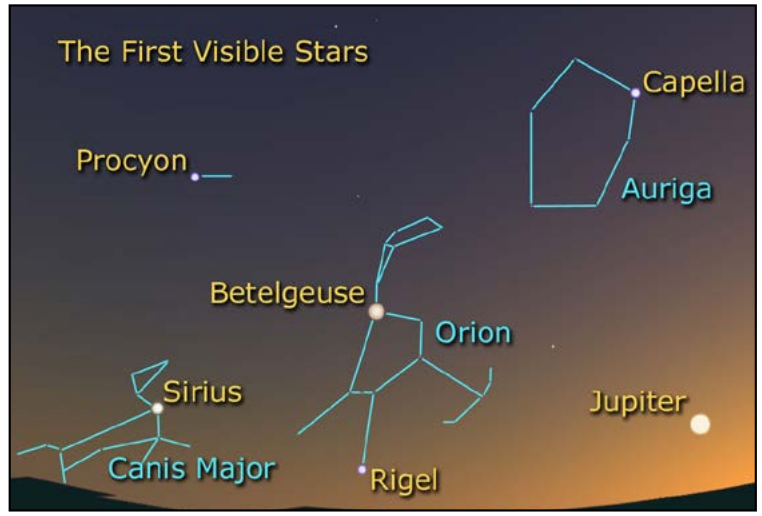
Better than being named after an animal I suppose. It is in the prime of life, burning its Hydrogen furiously, making it over twice as hot as our Sun.

Orion also disappears during the month.

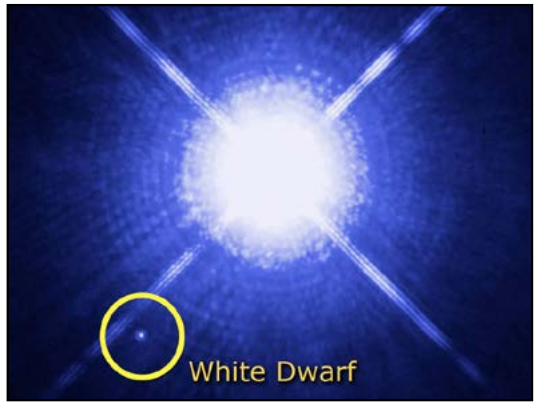
Now, I'm a bit of a sceptic when it comes to comets but one will be making the news in April, especially during the total eclipse on the 8th which is not visible here in the UK.

It is named after the two people who discovered it, "Pons-Brooks", and will pass underneath Jupiter at its brightest on the 15th April, probably too low for us to see but this is the perfect place to find the International Space Station.

Go to heavens-above.com to find times and exact locations.



Dark skies start later: As we progress further into spring, these are some of the stars likely to be seen in the early evening.
Images courtesy of NASA.



The Hubble Space Telescope's view of Sirius: Spot the white dwarf 'Sirius B'.

THE RETIREMENT RIDDLE

Martin Pryor discusses how every retirement plan is personal, and how PPM can help you plan for yours.

EACH year since 2019, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA) has set about answering the question of how much retirement costs for couples and single retirees.

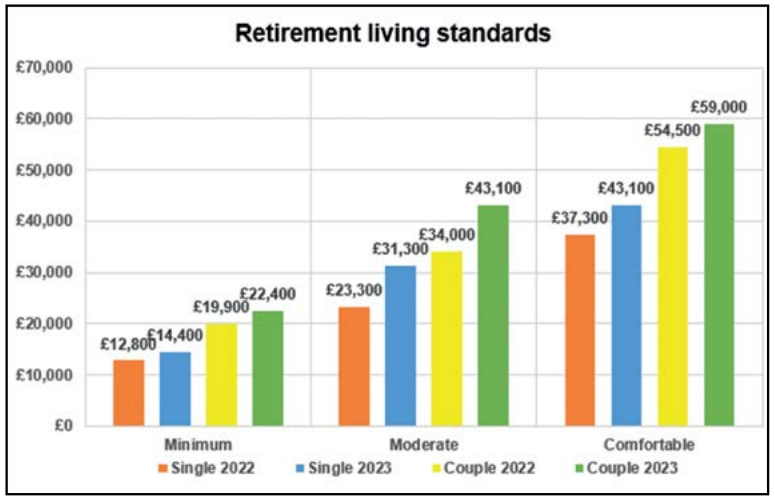
PPM Financial Planning have an awkward relationship with these studies because we believe that everyone's lifestyle costs are uniquely different.

One person's comfortable is another person's minimum and the next persons excess.

What the study does do is successfully keep the topic of retirement planning on the table and gets people thinking.

It considers three different Retirement Living Standards, which are summarised as:

■ Minimum: covers all your needs with some disposable income.



Retirement living standards: Demonstrating net income requirements for couples and single people in 2022 and 2023.

■ Moderate: more financial security and flexibility.

■ Comfortable: more financial freedom and some luxuries.

To give a more granular idea of what the different standards imply, the table below demonstrates how two sub-categories break down for food and drink, holidays and leisure.

For the first time since 2019, the Moderate and Comfortable standards have been "rebased" to allow for changed spending patterns.

For example, out went two cars for the Comfortable standard and in came much higher spending on clothes in the Moderate standard.

The rebasing means the gap between the 2023- and 2022-income requirements reflects more than just inflation – leading to the 34% jump for the Moderate single income requirement.

The bottom-line costs shown in the graph above are net (after-tax) income requirements and take no account of any rental expenditure.

As a reminder, from April 2024 the new State pension will be £11,502 a year.

	MINIMUM	MODERATE	COMFORTABLE
FOOD AND DRINK	Around £95 a week on groceries. £50 a month per couple on food outside of the home. £30 a month per couple on takeaways.	Around £100 a week on groceries. £60 a week per couple on food outside of the home. £20 a week per couple on takeaways. £100 a month to take others out for a monthly meal.	Around £130 a week on food. £80 a week per couple on food outside of the home. £30 a week per couple on takeaways. £100 a month to take others out for a monthly meal.
HOLIDAYS AND LEISURE	A week-long UK holiday. Basic TV and broadband plus a streaming service.	A fortnight three-star, all-inclusive holiday in the Mediterranean and a long weekend break in the UK. Basic TV and broadband plus two streaming services.	A fortnight four-star holiday in the Mediterranean with spending money and three long weekend breaks in the UK. Extensive bundled broadband and TV subscription.

PPM Financial planning put your numbers ahead of any financial advice we provide.

Our established client programme follows a strict three stage process;

■ Lifestyle Financial Planning meeting: During this meeting we talk solely about you. Where you have been, what have you accumulated, where do you want to go and how do you want to live the rest of your life. We take time to understand what money means to you.

■ Developing the financial plan: Between meeting one and meeting two we ask you to consider what your lifestyle costs are now and how expensive your life is likely to be when you no longer need to work, what are you going to do with your 40-60 spare hours a week and how much will that cost?

■ Providing Financial Advice: Only once we have agreed on the financial plan do we delve into our tool bag and provide you with the appropriate advice to achieve your plan.

This ensures we put the client's unique needs at the forefront of any advice we provide.

We believe we provide financial advice the right way.

The hardest aspect of our job is getting people to take some time out and spend time on themselves, not just their current selves but also their future selves.

All we say is don't leave that essential task until it is too late.

If your target financial freedom date is age 60 and you come to us at 50 then that is fine but we only have 120 months in which to create a plan. At 40 we have 240 months and even better at 30 we have 360 months!

The earlier you start a plan the better and cheaper it is, just read the chapter on the magic of compounding by Warren Buffet to understand the benefits of creating an early plan!

We do not charge for the first stage of our process – The Lifestyle planning meeting, so commit to investing an hour of your time and give us a call to set a date.

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner
For more information, please contact us
Tel: 07961 162818
martinpryor@ppmfinancialplanning.com
www.ppmfinancialplanning.com

The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate Tax Planning This article should not be regarded as personal advice. You should seek independent financial advice to apply these theories to your circumstances.

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Create your financial plan today

Your financial plan will help you understand what your unique minimum, moderate and comfortable lifestyle costs look like.

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FIRST-TIME BUYER?

Mark Meads gives his top tips for first-time buyers, and how **Village Financial** can help you with your finances when you move.

I WAS asked last week what advice I would give to first-time buyers, so here are my top tips:

■ **Find out how much you can borrow** - speak to us before you start looking at properties.

As mortgage advisers, we can confirm what you are able to borrow and how much the costs will be, as well as giving advice on the overall house buying process.

It is always better to know what you can afford so you are not disappointed if the property you are considering is not yet affordable.

■ **Save a deposit** - whilst a 5% deposit should be enough to get you on the property ladder, if you are able to save a 10% deposit, the rates and lending options can be much better.

■ **Be careful with your credit score.** Keep yourself credit worthy by keeping your credit card and loan payments up to date. Whilst missing the odd credit card payment may not seem like a big deal, you will definitely have more lending options with a strong credit history.

I often chat with first time buyers well in advance of them spotting a property they love and making an offer, so please call me to discuss where you are now and how we can get you confidently on the property ladder.

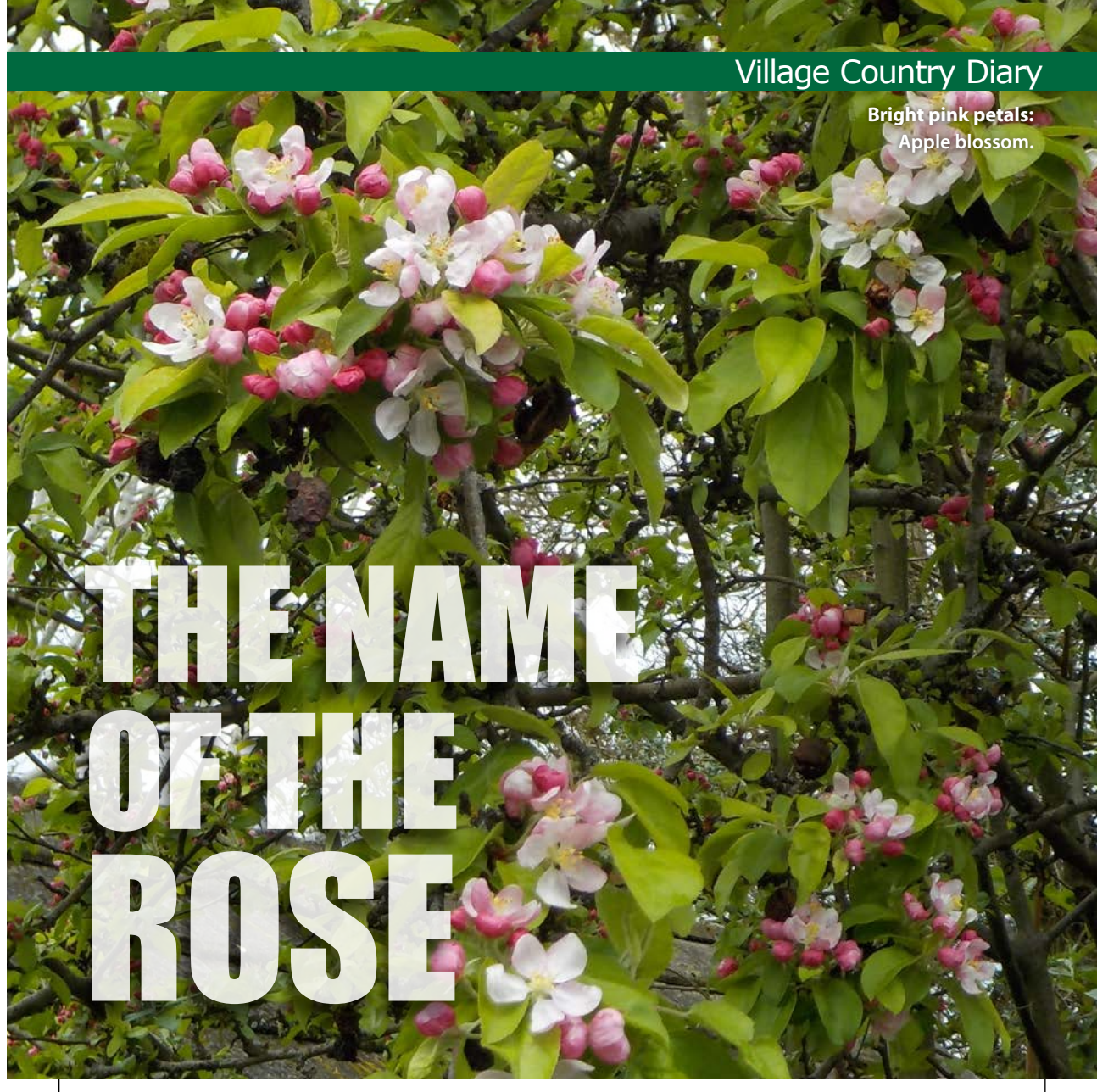
As well as first-time buyers we can also help those looking to move house, re-mortgage or even help in the Buy to Let Market.

Mark Meads (above), is here to help with all mortgage needs including first-time buyers.

At Village Financial we can support you in all your mortgage needs and we are able to advise on mortgages for all adults of any age and circumstance.

If you would like an initial conversation to see how we can help, please contact us on 07730 011897.
Or contact us through our website:
www.villagefinancial.co.uk

Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage



Bright pink petals: Apple blossom.

THE NAME OF THE ROSE

APRIL is the month of blossom, so I am looking at the family that includes most of our blossoming trees this month. The word "blossom" is an interesting one: it is the original Old English word for a flower, the word "flower" coming later into our language from French.

Nowadays we tend to use blossom for the flowers of fruit trees and a few others we consider pretty. It has connotations of fruitfulness and beauty.

The family is the Rose family. It is one of the biggest and most varied in this country. We have more than a hundred families in the UK, but some have only one or two different types or "genera" of plants.

The Rose family has many genera, some with many species. It includes our fruit trees, for a start.

Mary Green follows the village spring blossom and acquaints us with some interesting trees . . . and roses.

In February the cherry plum starts to flower, with rounded white five petalled flowers.

They had lovely blossom this year, including three new trees planted five years ago by the dead arm of

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A beautiful corridor: Blossom on Birches bridleway.

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the canal. Most years cherry plums carry fruit, yellow or red, edible but a bit unexciting!

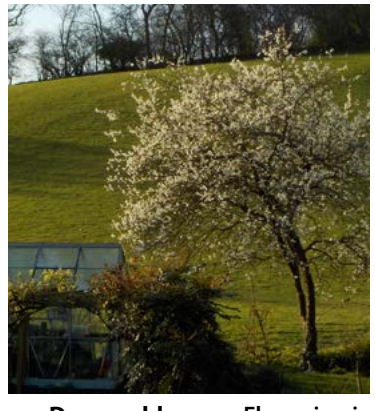
Next in March comes the blackthorn, thickly flowered, starry and white on dark thorny bushes.

Many started early this year in February. Both are in the Prunus genus, along with the bullace or wild plum and all our cultivated plums and damsons. Sometimes these interbreed, being from the same genus, and you can find blackthorn which has been cross-pollinated by bullace or cherry-plum and developed different sized flowers and fruit or different flowering times.

Wild cherry or gean is also a Prunus. This is common round here in hedges and woodland and is a very beautiful white flower, larger and more open than the others. It flowers in April. The fruits are red and edible, though not very sweet. It's hard to get them as the birds have them as soon as they are ripe, especially blackbirds.

There are beautiful wild cherry trees up Birches bridleway and along the Redditch ring roads. Oddly enough both habitats (one a remnant of ancient woodland and the other a late 20th century planting) are great for seeing all the Prunus coming in turn.

Wild cherry flowers: Common in local hedges.

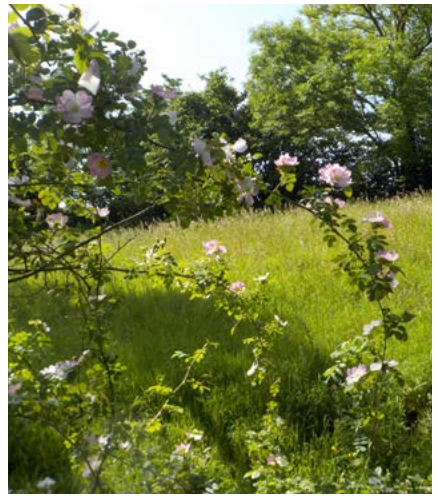


Damson blossom: Flowering in early spring.

The Field Rose: Look out for them in summer.

There's another Prunus called bird-cherry which grows in the north of England. It's not native here but is planted quite a lot, especially on the edge of the Lickeys where the soil is more acid. You can also find it along the motorway and newer road edges. It has long drooping clusters of white flowers in April.

Prunus all have stone fruit. The way they come in sequence means they can each be pollinated by the insects around at the time but not compete with each other. They all need insect pollination, hence the scent and attractiveness of the flowers.



Dog rose: Coming into the sunlight.

Pear and apple are in the Rose family too. Wild pears are rare, but many "wildings" of domesticated pears grow here – there are some in the field hedges near my house with distinctive bright-white blossom in March or April.

True wild apples or crab apples are common though, as well as wildings. They have abundant pinkish-white blossom in April and small hard green or yellow fruit, sometimes very plentiful. Crabs can cross-pollinate with wildings.

Some years by the end of April the next Rose family blossom will come – the may or hawthorn. This is affected by the weather and may bloom early or not until later in May. Its leaves have been out since February. The blossom is thick, creamy-white and heavily scented. The fruit – haws – and the leaves are edible.

You may find examples of the older midland hawthorn as well as the common hawthorn, especially if you see early blossom.

At the same time there are other small trees in the Rose family flowering – whitebeam, rowan, wild service - all open white flowers, some heavily scented.

Above: Crab apples, look out for the blossom in April.

All the above are trees. Botanically it doesn't matter if they are quite small and we call them bushes or shrubs. They are still trees. The difference between trees and other plants is they have a woody structure that doesn't die down in the winter.

Some trees are really tiny – there's a little willow that I've seen in the Scottish highlands that only reached my ankles – but they're still trees.

Trees have complex root systems and inter-relate a lot with fungi. Most shed their leaves in autumn and replace them in spring (deciduous), though a small number ("evergreens") shed and replace them all year round.

Our Rose family trees are all deciduous, relatively small and historically form the understory of ancient woodland. That makes them good for a hedge – or for a garden!

The way they flower and fruit means these trees are a crucial part of our ecosystem, providing nectar for bees, wasps, butterflies, hoverflies and many other insects, and later fruits for birds and small mammals. Flowers in this family nearly all have five petals.

As well as trees, the family includes climbing plants which also carry fruit. The most obvious genus is roses. Hereabouts we have the pink dog rose and white field rose, both flowering in June, and in other parts of the country you can also find sweet briar, downy rose and burnet rose (one that doesn't climb).

Above: A dog rose being pollinated.

Climbing plants are important because they can climb into the sunlight and so flower in woodland even when the trees have leaves. Rose hips are edible if you remove all the seeds.

A very similar plant – climbing, five-petalled, pink or white and bearing edible fruit – is one we don't seem to love like the rose – this is the bramble or blackberry.

It's a very successful plant, will grow pretty much anywhere, and is vital for our insects and birds. We like the fruit, but don't like the way it grows. However, it only really takes over too much when we have altered the balance of nature and can grow happily along with trees and herbal plants.

The fruit list goes on – strawberries

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and raspberries are in the Rose family too. The wild strawberry grows well round here, in woodland, hedges and sometimes in more open spaces (including the platform bank at Alvechurch station!)

It seems to like growing at the edge of walls too and I have it outside my front door. It creeps along and grows new small plants at the end of "runners" as well as being pollinated and having fruit. The fruit is small but delicious. There's a similar plant called barren strawberry which flowers earlier but doesn't have edible fruit.

Many plants in this family we find very pretty. One genus is the Potentillas or cinquefoils. You may not know their names, but you'll see them. They have bright yellow flowers, and five-fold leaves (hence the name cinque-foil, meaning five-leaf) and a creeping habit like strawberries.

Common cinquefoil grows along the towpath, verges and in field edges. A smaller one, tormentil, is generally only found in really old pastures and open heathland.

Silverweed is perhaps the easiest to identify. It has soft silver leaves in pairs each side of a stem and lovely yellow five petalled flowers. It grows by path sides and roadsides among other places and used to be called the pilgrim's plant because of its wayside habit.

Its soft leaves were used to line shoes and help with blisters. It will grow on land where other plants don't and can appear after heavy mowing or disturbance of the ground. It's also edible, and in parts of Scotland was known as the famine plant because it was a source of food when crops failed.

Then there are several genera with clusters of smaller flowers which doesn't look so immediately like roses.

Summer flowers like meadow-sweet, creamy and frothy along the canal, belong, and so does Lady's Mantle. The latter we know best as a garden flower, Alchemilla, but it grows wild in at least one place near Alvechurch.

The Latin name means the little alchemist: it was believed that the dew that gathers on the leaves was especially pure water and the plant thought to have magical properties.

There's agrimony, another flower of ancient pasture which grows in special places near here.

So many of our traditional and much-loved meadow, pasture and hedgerow flowers are Roses by family. And they are essential food for so many of our insects, birds and mammals.

We'd adopted the rose as our national symbol long before this system of classifying plant families came in, but it's a good choice!

■ **Here's a poem (right) I wrote a few years ago around this time of year.**

Clockwise from above left: A member of the Rose family, the Barren strawberry; Meadow-sweet found along the canals; the bright yellow flowers of silverweed.

Orchard

This is the time of blossom. Damson and plum
Every year transform my window's view to glory
White, arching, twisting, flowers behind flowers
Behind them in my mind blackthorn and cherry
And all the orchards of old Worcestershire
Open to the bees and to the eyes, hungry for spring.
Fragile, though, in their purity. Flowering when
Any morning you may wake and see another white -
The frost behind them, placing a dead hand
Over their young lives, invisible, insidious
Until the summer comes and you find there's no fruit.
You want to protect them, throw a giant fleece over the village
But you can't, and they take their chances, naked in the wind.
Every year I want to hold this time, the perfect whiteness
But it passes, as it must, and blossoms fall
Green maturity comes and the fruit swells fatly
Ready for ripeness in the wasp-filled days.
So every year, I wait for it again, and it comes back
Life is good and the sun shines and we will survive.
Except when the men come with diggers
And take them out, and the new gardeners
Tidy them away, so each year there are fewer
And one day we may wake and find no blossom.
We all have to plant orchards in our lives
Fighting the dead hand, working for the light.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

From 'goose' to 'dusky ousel'

BLACKBIRD. Top marks for accuracy but possibly the most unimaginative bird name in existence, particularly when you've got the gorgeous bushshrike, glowing puffleg and scaly-throated leaftosser.

Thinking about it, my beloved corvids: raven, crow, rook, chough are black and birds too. Black cap, well yes if you're a male, if female you're a browncap. Great tit? A very good tit agreed, but a great tit? I may need some clarification.

If you are a bookish person you'll probably have a pile of books that you have mentally filed in the "I'll get round to them one day" section. One of mine, *Mrs. Moreau's warbler – How birds got their names,* has shed much light on the bird name conundrum. It's a brilliant book by Stephen Moss, top birder, writer and Bill Oddie's producer on *Springwatch*.

So, with the help of Mr Moss, let's dip into the weird and wonderful world of bird names . . .

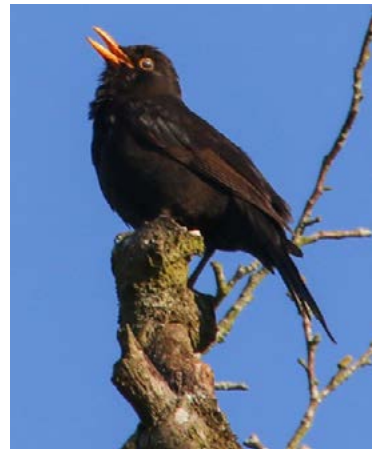
While it is fairly obvious that many birds are named after their appearance, habitat or the sound they make, the derivation of the bird names is also an insight into our history and development of our language.

The oldest bird name is thought to be "goose" or originally "ghan" (from where we get gander), and comes from the Steppes of Central Asia around 5,000 years ago.

Many of the oldest names like cuckoo, swallow and swan are migratory birds and would hold great significance for people indicating the changing of the seasons, predicting weather and a natural calendar for planting and reaping.

Many bird names that exist today have their root in "folk names" coined by ordinary people and have endured through the centuries connecting us with the past.

The tit family comes from the 14th century "titmouse" which in turn came from the Old English "mose" meaning small creature. So great tit could be taken to mean "bigger small creature" rather than "really good tit", although in their pristine spring plumage, belting out their "teacher teacher" call, I think "marvellous tits" wouldn't be out of place.



The blackbird: An unimaginative name? *Image/Paul Wilde*

The "Chinese whisper" process of changing names over time explains the familiar but seemingly illogical names that still exist today. Take redstart, not a bird we will see often on our patch unfortunately, but if you do see one, the reddish orange tail is very striking. That explains the "red", but where does "start" come from? Well, steort is Anglo Saxon for tail . . .

Wheatear is another bird you may have seen. It is a distinctive migratory bird arriving in the spring to rocky moors, mountain and coast. Nothing to do with ears of wheat then? No, but it does have a distinctive white, er, "rump".

The French root of the mallard, pigeon, kestrel and merlin were used by the aristocratic classes for the birds they hunted, trapped and used for falconry, as Norman French influenced the language after the conquest.

Our Celtic, Roman, Anglo Saxon, Norse and French heritage is all there in our bird names.

The next naming phase came with early naturalists, the Attenborough's of their day, rather like Victorian plant collectors, tirelessly recording new species around the world. Birds often took on the name of a dedication by, or, of the finder of the new species. Strangely the only way these dedicated nature lovers could identify the bird in detail before optics were available was by shooting them.

So with all these different names flying about (plus the national names for the same bird, for example a goldcrest for us is a sommergoldhahnchen for Germans!), to end the confusion around 300 years ago, Carl Linnaeus (Sweden's greatest export prior to ABBA) undertook the unenviable task of giving every living thing two latin names, ie: their scientific name.

Simple. For example, if I asked you what bird's scientific name is puffinus puffinus, you might think it's a puffin, but no it's quite obviously a Manx shearwater (named after a place, which is another bird thing).

This brings us back to the blackbird issue. Why a blackbird in the first place? In old English a "bird" was a small or young bird. Larger birds like ravens, crows etc. would collectively be known as "fowl", as recorded in the Bible: ". . . and Adam gave names to all cattle and to the fowl of the air…"

Thus blackbird made perfect sense 600 years ago – although it has been known an "ousel" in some parts of the north Midlands.

With all this in mind I'm proposing an update. . . with it's fantastic cool song to be heard as the sun goes down, the fact the female is brown and as an antidote to southern bias, surely "dusky jazz ousel" makes more sense?

With thanks to Stephen Moss.

JL

For the love of gardening

Leighanne Gee tells *The Village* how an early passion for gardening has led her to **Fern n Furl**, how young people should follow their guts and reminds us of all the garden jobs we should get on with this Easter.

IT'S been 20 years since I decided that I was going to be a gardener . . . my school held a careers fair, representatives of all the local sixth forms and colleges were there to show us the subjects they had available to offer.

Underwhelmed by the subjects (it didn't seem much different to school), I wandered from stall to stall until I came across somewhere offering courses nothing like the others, in animal care, sports and horticulture. I had no idea that you could study plants and work as a gardener – I thought gardening was just a hobby (for old people) and – surely you didn't need to learn how to mow?

Fascinated, I signed up to the BTEC National Diploma in Horticulture. I applied for a weekend job at Bournville Garden Centre to complement my studies, and was quickly immersed in the world of plants.

Five enjoyable years later I graduated, leaving Pershore College, with a BSc degree in Horticulture and a need to prove myself.

Fortuitously, I started a decade-long career at Winterbourne House & Garden, at the University of Birmingham, getting practical, hands-on experience, training alongside my colleagues and building confidence in my own abilities.

With thousands of plants on site, there was always something new to learn; how to prune the pleached lime walk, the 100-year-old Wisterias, the nut walk, the roses, apples and pears.

With such a variety of tasks to complete, each day was different: the walled garden had crisp mown paths, borders full of blousy perennials, and fruit, vegetables and cut flowers in the surrounding beds. The nursery work included potting up thousands of bulbs and plants and caring for more specialist plants like orchids and alpines.

If you get the chance, a visit to Winterbourne is a lovely way to spend the morning (or afternoon) and it has a great cafe with good cake, too.

A year ago, I started to pave a different path, leaving my chaotic morning commute to build something new; a gardening business for clients that need help and appreciate a high quality service.

After setting it all up, and joining the Gardener's Guild, I sat by the phone and waited, unsure if I'd made a really big mistake – what if the world really didn't need another gardener?

And then I got a call from a lady in Alvechurch. She told

Tis the season: For cheerful, sunny daffodils.

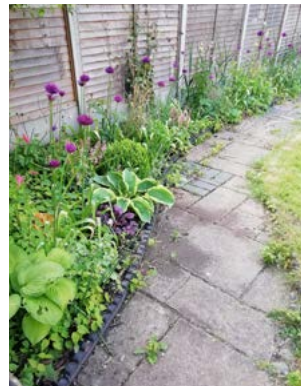
me that she'd been looking for a gardener for a while to help her with her plants in the borders.

She needed someone to prune the buddleia, the roses, clematis and fuchsias. She wanted to rejuvenate a border with pollinator-friendly plants. She asked if I could help her. . . and so I'd found my first client.

Thankfully, she wasn't my last! I've been privileged to work in many gardens, from small to large, in various styles and tastes.

Initially, I'd assumed that everyone would want a Chelsea Flower Show level of finish; with immaculate beds and pristine edges. Some do, of course, while others prefer a more natural look, with only the invasive weeds, and prolific self-seeders removed.

It's purely personal preference and most tend to want theirs to fall somewhere between the two.



Perfect edging: A path is transformed, before (above left), and after (above right).

WHERE TO START THIS SPRING

Speaking of weeding, it isn't the only springtime task to get on with, there's still time to get those congested clumps of snowdrops split and transplanted.

Think back to when they were still in flower, did you have a couple of patches in a landscape of bare earth? You could have a lovely drift of bright white blooms through the borders, alongside the paths or maybe under your trees.

No snowdrops? Maybe you've got asters, rudbeckias, geraniums, iris? Have they filled the available space? Are they crowding out their neighbours?

Lots of herbaceous perennials benefit from a bit of division (every three to five years) to keep them in check.

It's getting a bit late now, but if you haven't already, remove last year's hydrangea flowers! Take care when working around the new leaf buds as they can knock off.

Hardy fuchsias can also be pruned now, you can reduce the height by half, or if it's really tall, woody and congested, it can be cut back hard to around five inches tall. It will look a bit drastic but the plant will soon recover.

And, if you've got ferns, give them a check over. Deciduous ferns may have held last year's fronds, but they'll be bedraggled by now so snip them off. Evergreen ferns are likely to look happier, but you can still remove any marked or damaged fronds.

It's all very exciting for produce, too: chit your seed potatoes ready for planting, plant garlic and onion sets, sow cut flowers, vegetables, and herbs.

You can feel the short days are behind us, and the temperatures are slowly rising.

The mornings are full of birdsong and the bumblebees and ladybirds are active again.

The daffodils are still standing strong and although the crocus are fading, cowslips, muscari and tulips are taking their place.

If you're lucky, you might spot the evergreen clematis (C. armandii) in bloom; its scented white flowers are something special. There are also some stunning magnolia trees out now, I've seen the delicate white petals of M.

Beautiful borders: With Pulmonaria, snowdrops in-the-green, and brunnera.

Left: A close up of perennial Brunnera 'Jack Frost'.
Right: Bight blue muscari flowers.

stellata, and the deep magenta M. 'Susan' on my travels. There's so many varieties available, even for a smaller garden, they make a valuable addition at this time of year.

Closer to the ground, you may have spotted these blousy mounds; Pulmonaria 'Blue Ensign' and Brunnera 'Jack Frost'. They're tough, early little perennials that flower prolifically whilst most other plants are just waking up.

I hope you, too, spot the beauty of spring while it's here, and remember, you don't need an acre of land to feel the benefits of nature; a beautiful potted display or a seasonal flower arrangement can brighten up your home.

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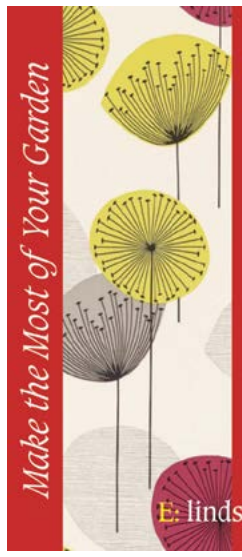

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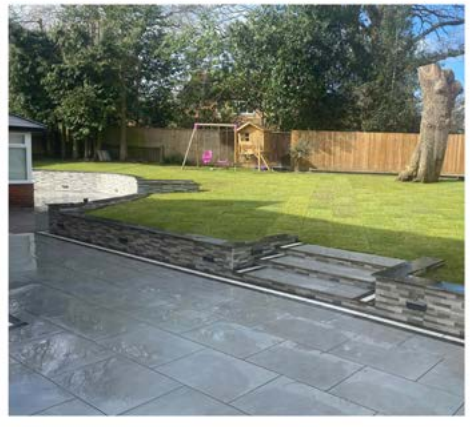

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Village What's On

EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA PRESENTS A "FAMILY CONCERT" on Saturday 11th May at 3pm in St Laurence Church. This is a fun-filled afternoon for the whole family that will include the story of Alice in Wonderland to music. Tickets: £8 adults £3 students & under 16s under 5 free FROM: The Lounge & Gin & Pickles Alvechurch, also by BACS on www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk
On Saturday 29th June celebrated guitarist CRAIG OGDEN will join TMS for a concert including Vivaldi's 'Concerto in D' and Boccherini's 'Fanfango'. LOVE AND ROMANCE' will be at St Laurence Church, Alvechurch at 7.30pm (doors & bar open at 7pm). Tickets: £15, £3 students & over 5s from The Lounge & Gin & Pickles Alvechurch also by BACS on www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk £17.50 & £3 on the door (cash or card) subject to availability. This concert is part of Bromsgrove Festival www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk

ALVECHURCH BAPTIST CHURCH will be holding their next lunch for carers past and present, those who are cared for either by family members or agencies, or perhaps, if you are just alone will be on Wednesday 10th April at 12pm at the Baptist Church. It is a time for enjoying food meeting new and old friends and sharing a problem or difficulty. There is no charge, donations welcome. If you would like to come on the 10th please ring or message either 0121 447 7369 or 0791710893 or e-mail dlshoesmith@yahoo.co.uk to book a place.

ALVECHURCH AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETYs next production *Murder on the Nile* premieres in April at Alvechurch Village Hall.
Join in, as the cast board the Nile steamer *Lotus* and set sail on a glamorous voyage . . . but fatal circumstances await when the idyllic surroundings are shattered by a shocking and brutal murder. Under scrutiny are a multitude of memorable passengers, all with a reason to kill. The tension and claustrophobia builds, as a shocking and audacious conspiracy is laid bare.
This classic Agatha Christie thriller is full of twists and turns to keep you guessing until the end. Performances on 25-27 April. Tickets are £9, with £8 concessions. Tickets are available from The Lounge, Alvechurch or phoning/texting 07977 140088. You can also email: ads.alvechurch@gmail.com

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. For more information or to join or book us, see our website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They are in the Crown Inn on 8 April after their Easter break, then in the Village Hall every Monday till the end of April.

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy, cinema and jazz nights. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.
For more information and details, contact Paul on 07973 759340 or Richard 01527 66646.
The programme is subject to change if the circumstances dictate.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings.

They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical mu sic along with much more.
Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. They meet on Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs FREE weekly string orchestra, concert band and beginner group Lift Off! sessions for young musicians. New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at The Orchards School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm Individual instrumental lessons are also provided at the centre. For info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or r.g.henley@btinternet.com

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY meets in the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, on Mondays from 7.45 - 9.45pm. The choir sings a range of music throughout the year, performing at least 3 concerts. New singers are always welcome and there is no need to audition! For more information, see barntgreenchoralsociety.org or facebook.com/barntgreenchoralsociety.

DANCING

JAZZ HEELS CLASS FOR ADULTS. A new class held on Tuesdays 5:45-6:30pm at Hopwood Village Hall. For more info contact Amy on 07979408997

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/ Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Please check first by emailing alvechurchfrenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry. They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day. No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group!
Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

LINEDANCE CLASS, every Thursday between 6pm - 7pm at Extracare Longbridge Village.Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

BEGINNERS LINEDANCE class, Tuesdays 6pm - 7pm at West Heath Community Centre, Hamstead House, B31 3QY. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

NEW SALSA dance classes, every Thursday at the Alvechurch Inn, B48 7LD. Doors open at 6pm. Beginners classes at 7pm, with the main class at 8pm. All classes are £9 each or both classes for £15. Come on your own or with friends. Contact 07779686679.

BALLROOM/LATIN SEQUENCE dance some line dance held on the first Friday of the month (check just in case Friday has to change because of commitments in the village) from 8pm -10.30pm at Extracare Longbridge Village, B31 2FZ. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

WHAT'S ON GUIDE

FLYING ON TO THE BIG SCREEN

VILLAGE-MADE feature film *The Shamrock Spitfire,* which tells the true story of Dubli- born pilot Brendan Finucane, is to hit the big screen.

The film, shot in locations including Alvechurch, the Lickey Hills and Rowney Green, will be shown at Artrix, Bromsgrove, on Wednesday 3rd and Thursday 4th April.

***The Shamrock Spitfire* has now won more than 50 awards across the world. Its makers will also be attending the screening, including directors Ian and Dominic Higgins, of Hopwood, and producers Nigel Davey, of Cofton Hackett, and John Dawson, of Hanbury.**

For details visit The Artrix booking site or production company Pixel Revolution Films: www.pixelrevolutionfilms.com

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Friendship, cake, tea/ coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS invite you to their film screenings. Admission is free however donations are welcome. Full details can be found at The Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green. The next film on 6th April is set in post-World War 11 Venice, Hercules Poirot, now retired, reluctantly attends a séance. When one of the guests is murdered, the former detective must find the killer.
On 20th April the film will be Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 Biblical epic dramatizes the story of Moses, who leads the Hebrews out of slavery. On 18th May the showing will be Walt Disney's delightful film: a wily old codger matches wits with the King of the Leprechauns and helps play matchmaker for his daughter.
Upcoming events include Pressed leaves & Beeswax Art Exhibition on 1 June, 10am – 4pm/ 2nd June, 2pm – 4pm which will be introduced to us by international award-winning nature artist, Hui-Ying Chang from Taiwan.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood. Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. Info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact paul_and_carrol@live.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall, unless otherwise noted. Entry at talks and AGM is free for members and £1 for guests, including a drink and biscuits. Litter picks start at 10am. from the village square.
Other social events are by ticket and details of venue, start time and price will be published by the organisers nearer the time.
On Wednesday 17 April, Chris Miall will give an illustrated talk on "The Galapagos Islands" at Alvechurch Village Hall at 7.30pm. On Wednesday 15 May there will be a talk by Dr Richard Comont from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust at Alvechurch Village Hall at 7.30pm.

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details:
www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

continues overleaf

BIODIVERSITY WALKS

Mary Green's next biodiversity walks are on Friday 5 April and Wednesday 10 April at 10.30am.

These are slow, easy walks to look at areas of good habitat for wildlife around Alvechurch. Meet outside The Crown Inn, Withybed Green.

The walk takes about two hours. No need to book, just turn up.

For more information contact alvbiodiv@gmail.com

continued from previous page

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 2nd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Burcot Grange. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. or email contact@wbdcs.org.uk. Non-members are welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB meets on the 10th April at the Alvechurch Cricket Club at 1.30pm. This month's talk is by John Ullah and, entitled "Growing up in the 60's and 70's" which should be good fun, even if some of the group watched their children grow up during those decade! It's sure to be an enjoyable talk so, if you fancy listening along with the group members, please come along as they are a friendly and welcoming group!

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12pm at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides opportunities for retired and semi retired men to meet socially. A members meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Wednesday monthly 10am until 12pm, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. Other regular activities include monthly walks, lunches including partners, snooker--, social outings and IT. For more info visit www.bromsgrove1982probus.weebly.com or contact Martin on 07717 150136.

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955.

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

The North Worcestershire Association of the NATIONAL TRUST hold monthly meetings with interesting speakers on 3rd Thursday 7.30pm at Tardebigge Community Hall, also walks, outings and an annual holiday. For further info email Ros257@yahoo.co.uk

Bromsgrove & District AMATEUR RADIO CLUB meets every Friday evening from 7.30pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. The club is open to anyone with an interest in Amateur Radio. More details from the secretary Alan on 07886 000052 or secretary@bromsgroveradioclub.co.uk

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, please contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com. There are a number of walks coming up, the next will be A Wildlife Walk at a Slow Pace on 7 April, led by Mary Green at 2pm. Meet at The Crown in Withybed Green, B48 7PN. For details call 0121 445 5957.
The following walk will be held on 5 May at 2pm, which will be a walk from the Coach and Horses, led by Alan and Linda Helmore. Meet at the Coach and Horses, Weatheroak, B48 7EA.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties contact: barntgreenfishingclub@gmail.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

MEDITATION CLASSES for Everyone. Come and try a KIND approach to Meditation and experience for yourself the revitalising power of a relaxed, calm, clear mind, whether beginner or experienced practitioner. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, online or a mixture. REDUCE STRESS, FEEL CALMER, SLEEP BETTER. To join us for a trail contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F Sally My Yoga Mind

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park. Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area.
Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).
Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.
Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground. Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more.
All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @ longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES PILATES with Steff Affleck (Rowney Green) Mat classes, apparatus (reformer/ tower / barrels etc.) 1:1 and duets. Irrespective of age, gender, health or fitness we could all benefit from understanding more about how to keep moving well. Joseph Pilates' system of exercise, using apparatus he invented, enables you to challenge what is strong, build what is weaker, exploring how you can balance the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence.
Graduate of Pilates Professional Advanced Teacher Training; teaching Pilates for 17 years.
Call 07759590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

ACTIVE SENIORS Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Village Hall, run by Bromsgrove council on Fridays starting 9.15am, £5 per class. Contact g.peart@hotmail.co.uk or call on 07828 515344 for more information.

YOGA for Every-Body. Come and try a fresh approach to Yoga, that works with your body rather than against it. A slow-paced, yet powerful Yoga for EveryBody, whether beginner or experienced, flexible or wishing you were. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, Blackwell First School, online or a mixture. MOVE BETTER, BE CALMER, FEEL GREAT! To trial a class, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F: Sally My Yoga Mind

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

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HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm.

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

6 WEEK MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS COURSES to help you relax, find inner peace, and elevate your life. Join them on Wednesday evenings at The Friends Meeting House in Barnt Green or online whenever it suits you. Suitable for everyone! Enrol in the upcoming courses and discover how they've been changing lives at www.MeditationWithCoz.com or contact Coz at 07770067349. Follow on Facebook/Instagram: @MeditationWithCoz.

BARNT GREEN CHUGGERS & CHAINGANG provide run & cycling sessions for mixed abilities, those wanting to stay in shape plus those wishing to improve their running, cycling & fitness all in a social & recreational environment. Club Sessions - Chuggers (run) Monday & Wednesday 7pm and Chaingang (cycling) Wednesday 7pm & Saturday 9am all from Barnt Green Sports Club. For more info or to arrange a trial session please contact Membership Secretary kategallimore@googlemail.com

GENTLE EXERCISE CLASSES working on mobility, strength, flexibility and balance. Classes are very welcoming and inclusive and are held on: Wednesday's 1.30-2.30 at St Stephens Church Hall, Rednal and Thursdays 10am-11am Blackwell Community Hall, Blackwell. The cost is £5 per class. For more information call Lorraine 07866877881

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday of each month at 7.15pm. On Thursday 11th April 2024 they welcome their speaker Samantha Hopes and her topic is Hepaticas. Samantha went to work alongside John Massey as part of the team at Ashwoods Nurseries looking after his Hepatica collection. This became one of her passions alongside specialist alpines. Guests are welcome £3.50 including coffee and biscuits. For more information please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 07843758489 .

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share and discuss it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so.
They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request." For more information and date of next meeting, contact marygreen5005@gmail.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroftarts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the first Thursday of the month from 2pm–3pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide Headquarters in Blackwell Road just beyond the Barnt Green Social Club. They run Tuesday morning and afternoon sessions with visiting tutors at 2 - 3 week intervals. Interested artists of all abilities are welcome. Please phone Jackie on 0121 445 4745 for details.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

THE SEASONS ART CLASS is an art course where you can discover your inner artist. Perfect for absolute beginners to improvers. Classes held at Rowney Green Village Hall, Bournheath Village Hall & Ullenhall Village Hall. Get in touch to find out more by emailing seasonsartredditch@outlook.com.

KINGS NORTON PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY meet at The Tennis Club, Grange Hill Road, Birmingham B38 8RE. For information contact Dave Wall Tel: 0121 458 2562, email: dave.walluk@virgin.net

FORGE MILL CREATIVE TEXTILE GROUP are a friendly group of enthusiastic local stitchers, both experienced and beginners. They meet on Friday mornings at Beoley Village Hall. They are a leisure learning and development group exploring various techniques and media to create textiles artwork. Please contact Lynda on 0121 445 3212 or Janet on 0121 445 4335 for more information.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

CURIOUS CUBS: An outdoor playgroup promoting nature and learning through play. Sessions run on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays for walkers to five years. Based at Barnt Green Sports Club, Margesson Drive, B45 8LR. Visit www.curiouscubs.co.uk for more infomation and to book your place.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 18 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/ venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG.
Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

PRE-SCHOOL BALLET - Pre-school (2 ½ - 4 yrs) ballet held at Barnt Green Baptist Church on Monday mornings from 10am. Contact dancingpointe@outlook.com for further details.

STAY & PLAY for under 5s and their carers (from 11th April 2024) running each Thursday from 9:30-11:30am during term time at Barnt Green Baptist Church, Bittel Road. Just pop along for play, singing & story time. Email familypastoral@bgb.org.uk for more info.

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcrosswi.org or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email be-oleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7pm on the second Tuesday every month between April and November, and at 12pm December to March, at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence (01527 822622)or email bent-leypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.
BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Lin Neal lin.neal@hotmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susanbarratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

FAIRFIELD WI meet at Fairfield village hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm. For further details contact Carol Hine at fairfieldwi1932@gmail.com

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE HALL is available for hire to groups, clubs, societies, and private parties. The hall has a stage, PA system, kitchen and bar area. There is also a smaller conference room available for hire. Enquiries to the Hall Manager Andrea Ottley on 07455892909 or hallmanager.avh@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH CRICKET CLUB PAVILION is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FAIRFIELD VILLAGE HALL is available to hire for functions, groups and parties. It has a large hall with kitchen facilities. Contact the booking secretary Andrew on 07762749943 or bookings@fvh.org.uk. See website for details www.fvh.org.uk

ROWNEY GREEN VILLAGE HALL has a large hall, with stage and sprung floor (ideal for dance and exercise) and two smaller rooms. Available for one off or regular hire, ample parking. Email: admin@rowneygreenvillagehall.org

Late run of defeats ratchets up the tension

A LATE-SEASON stutter in form has introduced just a few nerves for fans of Alvechurch FC .

Three defeats in four games means that as *The Village* goes to press there is an arithmetical chance of the side finishing in the relegation zone at the end of the season.

Sitting five places clear of the drop on 42 points, however, Alvechurch should be strong enough to hold off any challenge and string together sufficient points over the final six games of the season.

Meanwhile, the side will be preparing for some spring excitement and the chance of silverware in the Worcestershire Senior Cup final away against Evesham United on April 10.

■ Remember, you can now keep up with all of the men's first team games on YouTube channel @Alvechurch Matchdays

AFC FIXTURES

April

Mon 1st	Halesowen Town (a)	3pm
Sat 6th	Broms Sporting (h)	3pm

Worcestershire Senior Cup final at Evesham United Wed 10th 7.45pm

Sat 13th	Coalville Town (a)	3pm
Sat 27th	St Ives Town (a)	3pm

Fancy a padel?

TWO PADEL tennis courts are under construction at Alvechurch FC's facilty, The Hayes, in West Heath. and will be opening on April 19. Membership will be available for those wishing to play.

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